

H.R. 4202 – FORT ONTARIO STUDY ACT  
MAY 24, 2016  
REP. JOHN KATKO (NY-24)

I want to thank the Chairman for putting this hearing together and allowing me to speak on my bill, H.R. 4202, the Fort Ontario Study Act.

Overlooking the beautiful shores of Lake Ontario, Fort Ontario stands as a testament to the great history of Central New York and the important role the region has played in our nation's history from the French and Indian War through World War II.

Serving first as a military installation during the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812, Fort Ontario went on to be strengthened during the Civil War and utilized as a hospital camp during World War I.

In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared Fort Ontario as an Emergency Refugee Camp. From 1944 to 1946, Fort Ontario served as the nation's only Emergency Refugee Camp, providing shelter to over 980 refugees during World War II. In recognition of the Fort's use as a refugee shelter, primarily for Jews fleeing Hitler's Europe, the site also hosts the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum.

Following World War II, the Fort was transferred to the State of New York to house war veterans and their families until 1953. Fort Ontario, now a New York Historic Site and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, draws residents of New York and visitors from across the nation to experience the rich history of the Fort and the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum.

After visiting Fort Ontario and the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, meeting with the community of Oswego, New York which has rallied behind the 260 year old Fort, and witnessing the tremendous history being preserved and passed on, I introduced H.R. 4202, the Fort Ontario Study Act. This legislation would commission a special resource study of Fort Ontario to evaluate the site's national significance and determine the suitability of its designation as a part of the National Park system. Preserving this historic location as a National Park will not only preserve the rich history but has the potential to grow tourism and boost the regional economy of Central New York.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to advocate for the preservation of Fort Ontario and the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, irreplaceable and unparalleled pieces of our nation's history and the fabric of Central New York.